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# STUDIES

IN  
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

Friendship in Jesuit Life

*The Joys, the Struggles, the Possibilities*

CHARLES M. SHELTON, S.J.

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A group of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

The Seminar studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation that religious institutes recapture the original inspiration of their founders and adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material that it publishes.

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FRIENDSHIP IN JESUIT LIFE

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*Charles M. Shelton, S.J.*

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STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

27/5: NOVEMBER 1995

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*For your information . . .*

## HDQ

Those three letters, "HDQ," at the end of each of twenty-four names on a list seemed so innocuous. But they were shorthand for "hanged, drawn, and quartered," the martyrdom undergone by all sixteen English Jesuits who have been beatified and by eight of the eleven who are canonized saints. Two of the other three saints were "simply" hanged and Brother Nicholas Owen, also known as "Little John," the master carpenter and builder of priest holes, was so savagely tortured that he burst asunder. All of the Jesuit saints imprisoned in the Tower of London as well as several of those who have been beatified were mentioned in last month's STUDIES, "Jesuits in Jail."

This information all entered into a recent pilgrimage-tour to parts of "Jesuit England" that I accompanied in the capacity of docent. We had the opportunity and the privilege to visit, among other places, the University of Oxford and the college (St. John's) where Edmund Campion studied and the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, where some four hundred copies of his controversial "Decem rationes" suddenly appeared on its benches on graduation day. At Campion Hall, the present Jesuit house of graduate studies named in his honor, where several of his relics are kept, we celebrated Mass. In London we visited the Tower and Tyburn. So many Jesuits were imprisoned and tortured in the Tower, and from it the Jesuit John Gerard was one of the few prisoners ever to escape. (*The Autobiography of a Hunted Priest* tells the story.) At Tyburn, now a busy London traffic intersection, the barbarous executions took place. The details of hanging, drawing, and quartering are not for the weak of stomach to hear at the time of meals or for the faint of heart to contemplate at any time. That makes all the more remarkable the heroism of these Jesuit brethren over a span of a century from the first executions in 1580 to the last in 1679.

It was not only the trip that summoned up these reflections but also, as I mentioned in the last issue of STUDIES, the United States edition of *A Study in Friendship: Robert Southwell and Henry Garnet*. The book is itself a labor of love by Philip Caraman, S.J., the English Jesuit already known for such other books as *The Lost Paradise*, on the Paraguayan Reductions, and *The Lost Empire*, on the early Jesuit mission to Ethiopia. *A Study in Friendship* recounts the deep friendship of Southwell, brave saint and great poet, executed four hundred years ago in 1595, and Garnet, superior of the Jesuit mission, himself executed some years later. The story is told especially through the poetry of Southwell and the letters written by Garnet to Claudio Aquaviva, the Jesuit general and a friend of both of the Englishmen. Then, too, at the beginning of each section of this present issue of STUDIES on friendship in the Society of Jesus stand quotations about the

friendship of Jesuits for each other that speak of Ignatius and Xavier and Favre and Canisius and Polanco and Aquaviva and Garnet and Southwell. Not an insignificant group of which to be a part. (Further information on the book can be found on the last page of this issue of STUDIES.)

Finally, we also had the unusual opportunity of visiting the Chapels Royal in St. James's Palace, the official London residence of the monarch from the time of Henry VIII to the nineteenth century. In those chapels from 1676 to 1678, St. Claude la Colombiere, sent from France to be chaplain to Mary of Modena, the Catholic wife of the Duke of York, later King James II, for the first time in England preached devotion to the Sacred Heart, that symbol of Christ's loving friendship for all humankind.

And almost unbelievably, while the Jesuits were officially banned in England, the English Province at one time held its province congregation in that very Palace of St. James's, the royal residence! But that is another story for another time.

*John W. Padberg, S.J.*  
*Editor*

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# FRIENDSHIP IN JESUIT LIFE

## *The Joys, the Struggles, the Possibilities*

*Think where man's glory most begins and ends and say my glory was  
I had such friends.*

—William Butler Yeats

*Your holy Charity writes to me of the great desires which you have to  
see me before you leave this life. God our Lord knows the impression  
which these words of great love made upon my soul and how many  
tears they cost me every time that I remember them.*

—Letter from Francis Xavier to Ignatius

*Through the many forms of their mutual presence to one another and  
their investment of themselves in one another's lives, Jesuits mediate to  
each other the presence of that Lord to whom they have offered them-  
selves through their vow of chastity. It is this mediation, this inter-  
change that makes their community religious. The continual and  
vital commitment of Jesuits to one another is a condition for a  
concomitant growth in chastity.*

—General Congregation 34, emphasis added

## I. Introduction

**I** make a request as you begin reading this article. Stop reading! Place this issue of STUDIES aside. Before continuing to read, sit back, relax, and engage in the following exercise. Ask yourself: Which Jesuits in my life mean the most to me? Which men in the Society do I have the most affection for? Name them. Image each of these men in your mind. Look at him. Talk to him. What do you say? What do you feel? How grateful are you?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I dedicate this issue of STUDIES to several Jesuit friends. Without each of these men's love and support, I don't know where or who I would be today. I encourage my readers to pause periodically and, as you make your way through this essay, call to mind close Jesuit friends. I hope that recollecting these friends will engender in you an affective



Men such as you imaged are what this article is about. Stated simply, it is a personal reflection on a Jesuit's deep love for the indispensable group of men he has come to call friends. I intentionally use the word "friend" in its narrow sense. We are all familiar with the term "friends in the Lord"—the wider community or Society that is bonded together through the vowed life to serve the Kingdom. For example, General Congregation 32 notes the need for Jesuits to be a "community of friends in the Lord," for "it is in companionship that the Jesuit fulfills his mission. He belongs to a community of friends in the Lord who, like him, have asked to be received under the standard of Christ the King."<sup>2</sup> In terms of this understanding, every man with "S.J." after his name is a friend of his brothers. Though there exists this more generalized bond of Jesuit brotherhood (friendship), I speak in this article of those specific one-on-one Jesuit friendships that are characterized by a significant level of affection, intimacy, disclosure, and trust.

Though several have written about Jesuit community and the wider notion of Jesuit brotherhood, to my surprise I have *never* seen anything written on "Jesuit friendship" as it is spoken of here. This seems all the more remiss (and sad) because these select Jesuit friends are so vital for our spiritual and emotional well-being as humans and as Jesuits. Think for a moment. Suppose every man you imaged in the first paragraph above had never existed. Suppose you had never had any of these men as friends. Pause for a moment and think what your life as a Jesuit would be like today. How would you here and now be experiencing Jesuit life differently? As I myself do this exercise, the thoughts that come to me suggest that without these specific friendships I would be less healthy, less complex, less content, and less committed to Jesuit life. The feelings that come to me are those of

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consciousness that will engage you more fully and make the words of this article more meaningful.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents of the Thirty-First and Thirty-Second General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, John W Padberg, S.J., ed. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1977), ¶25.

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sadness, loneliness, and fear. I even wonder if I would still be a Jesuit today if it were not for these deep loves in my Jesuit life—men who have stood by me, listened to me, supported me, and challenged me at one point or another over these past twenty-three years of Jesuit living.

From another vantage point, isn't one of the most wonderful things about being a Jesuit our being able to have such friendships? When we travel to a certain city or return to a community, isn't part of the enjoyment knowing that at the end of our journey there is a familiar face that brings warmth to our hearts, a brother we can laugh with and confide in to a degree beyond the everyday talk and banter that characterize so much of our community life?<sup>3</sup> Aren't such relationships vital for energizing and committing us to be apostolic men engaged in the Society's mission? Most certainly, such friendship was integral to the lives of the early companions. After taking their vows together at Montmartre in 1534, it is reported, they

felt bound together in a new intimacy of mutual love grounded in their identical self-ideal. Laynez remembered that from this time forward, although they did not live together, they would eat in the rooms of one another, besides having frequent visits and conversations which "inflamed their hearts with ardor." In retrospect, he saw this mutual familiarity and communication and unflagging attention to one another's needs, both spiritual and temporal, as the human bond of union which maintained their companionship for the aid of souls.<sup>4</sup>

We might even speculate whether the early Society would even have been viable if the early companions had not enjoyed such a rich friendship. We are all familiar with the Catholic theological principle that grace builds on nature. After reading the lives of the early companions, I believe a pivotal aspect of their nature was the deep emotional bond they experienced from personal friendship; this in turn energized their commitment and nurtured their communal brotherhood. For these first Jesuits, grace and friendship interact as mutual allies.

If such relationships are so vital, then why has a detailed study of so significant a topic been neglected in our Jesuit history? Two reasons come to mind. First, until the post-Vatican era caution against "particular friendship" was a common feature of Jesuit training. I have heard older Jesuits describe their training: during recreation periods, they had to walk in threes rather

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<sup>3</sup> The everyday conversation and banter typical of Jesuit community life are important. I simply maintain that for a healthy spirituality and humanity we also need the deeper type of friendship spoken of in these pages. One sad aspect of Jesuit life is that many men do not experience such deep friendship with any of the men with whom they live.

<sup>4</sup> John C. Futrell, S.J., *Making an Apostolic Community of Love* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), 24.

than twos, and they were expected not to spend too much time alone with the same companion. Homophobic fears and the cultural ethos of the time no doubt fueled such policies. Second, because we are members of a religious community, a myopically held assumption of "affection in common" prevailed—a sort of leveling of the emotional field. One older Jesuit related to me that, according to one of his professors, Jesuit relationships could best be described as a sort of "armed neutrality." Unfortunately, the assumption was that we somehow violated our common way of living if we wrote about or focused on specific relationships to the exclusion of the wider brotherhood. The problem with such a premise is, simply, that it doesn't work! Humans naturally desire bonded attachment and, depending upon the relationship, such attachment varies in its quality and intensity. Even in the forties and fifties, when the training was more restrictive, some Jesuits naturally gravitated toward certain men who later came to be considered close friends.

Discussing the topic of Jesuit friendship is a truly interdisciplinary undertaking;<sup>5</sup> as a clinical psychologist, however, I search for an understanding of Jesuit friendship from a psychological viewpoint. I admit this bias; but there are six reasons that justify my approach. First, one of the ruling paradigms in today's culture is, for better or worse, psychology. That is, people increasingly define their self-esteem and overall life satisfaction in terms of psychological understandings (asking, for instance, whether they are lonely). In this regard, it is my impression that relationships appear to play a particularly significant role for many younger Jesuits whose formation commenced after Vatican II, as they gauge their degree of satisfaction with Jesuit living.<sup>6</sup>

Second, healthy, mature friendships are a positive and necessary experience in each of our lives; any insights or understandings we might gain from reflecting on our relationships are in themselves positive accomplishments.

Third, the question of sexual orientation in the religious life is complex and has, regrettably, resulted in tension and potential divisiveness for some of us. The best way to handle such a discussion, I think, is to reflect on the role and meaning of friendship in Jesuit life. I will elaborate on this matter at greater length in the course of this article, but for the

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<sup>5</sup> For example, one could chronicle Jesuit friendship from the perspective of a historical inquiry or, taking the approach of spirituality, explore the "benefits" that friendship offers.

<sup>6</sup> I might allude here to the lack of opportunity for such relationships (so few younger Jesuits, leading to a sense of isolation) and the more general erosion and dysfunctional nature of some Jesuit communities. These are, I believe, significant factors in some men's unhappiness and subsequent decision to leave the Society.



moment I make this bald statement: Jesuit life is about friendship, *not* issues of sexual orientation.

Fourth, I fear that issues surrounding affectivity are creating problems for our individual and communal lives, all too often sapping our apostolic zeal. Think for a moment of the problems in your own community. Chances are a significant number of issues involve troubled personalities and conflicted relationships within the house. In many instances these problems of affectivity manifest themselves on the one hand when men are unable or unwilling to even acknowledge their feelings and needs; instead, they lead emotionally shriveled and seemingly affectless lives. On the other hand, these problems harass a number of our men who seem driven by affective needs—men who find impulse control difficult or become entangled in dependent or other types of impairing and destructive relationships.<sup>7</sup>

Fifth, over the years I have conducted a number of workshops for Jesuits in formation. During these workshops participants most frequently criticize the impoverished and emotionally crippled state of so many of our communities. Many of these men wonder as well why the Society and particularly those in authority are not more honest and straightforward in acknowledging these problems. My own observations confirm these men's impressions. Related to this, the lack of openness to the numerous issues existing among Jesuits leads to a significant degree of alienation among our younger members. Let me explain. In a marriage, if a couple do not openly acknowledge problems that need discussion, they sow the seeds for growing distance and eventual alienation; for their corrosive silence slowly but inevitably vitiates the essential meaning of their vowed life together. Similarly, many younger Jesuits who experience the Society as silent on these pressing and problematic issues of relationships and community living cannot help but experience growing alienation from the communal vowed life together, with its taboo topics for discussion and no-talk rules!

Finally, and related to the last point above, I write from a psychological perspective in order to counter what I believe is a dangerous but very real phenomenon among us Jesuits. I am referring to what I term "spiritualization." Our Jesuit-life experiences are a two-edged sword; that is, they can be used for good or less-than-growthful purposes. Jesuit spirituality has been

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<sup>7</sup> Regarding these problems, we should note that some men because of a particular life history (for example, an alcoholic home environment or sexual abuse) might have difficulty experiencing closeness or lack the skills to be close to other men or women. When such men are unwilling or lack motivation to seek professional help for such problems, the men who live with them and the Society as a whole experience one of the real "poverties" in Jesuit living today: the fundamental inability to realize on a communal or individual level the companionship to which we are called.

and is the source of tremendous good in the world. Yet I think there is a down side to our spirituality that our own fears and insecurities make us unwilling to address. We evade these questions when we cast our problems in a spiritual framework and avoid the real human issues involved. An example: We don't confront a man's drinking behavior; instead, we term it a spiritual problem or a personal cross for the individual to bear. Another example: A superior, provincial, or participants in a province assembly speak glowingly of apostolic accomplishments but fail to address crippling and ongoing problems in community living. Elsewhere I have termed this temptation to trumpet our successes and ignore our pain as "Jesuit narcissism."<sup>8</sup> As the Society faces increasing problems traceable to diminished mental health, aging, and declining numbers, our own survival makes it imperative that we address more adequately these nitty-gritty (and at times messy!) aspects of our lives. Applying this observation to the present discussion of friendship, then, I wish to avoid a spiritualization of this experience, focusing instead on the reality of intimate Jesuit relationships—bonded attachments that are a source of joy, trust, and hope, yet also, in the daily living of our lives, occasions for hurt, loss, and disappointment.

## II. Jesuit Friendship in the Context of Being Male and Religious

*I am at present enjoying the company of Master Peter [Canisius] and I have no words to tell you how sweet I find it.*

—Letter from Pierre Favre to a friend

**T**he experience of friendship exists within a historical and cultural context.<sup>9</sup> Further, a host of factors such as age, race, geographic area, temperament, and status influences our choice of friends and our ability to maintain such relationships.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Charles M. Shelton, S.J., "Reflections on the Mental Health of Jesuits," *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* 23, no. 4 (September 1991): 38.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Karen V. Hansen, "'Our Eyes Behold Each Other': Masculinity and Intimate Friendship in Antebellum New England," in Peter M. Nardi, ed., *Men's Friendships* (Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage, 1992), 35-58.

<sup>10</sup> Rosemary Blieszner and Rebecca G. Adams, *Adult Friendship* (Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage, 1992).



While not trying to dismiss the numerous sociocultural issues involved, I do think it helpful to provide a workable definition of Jesuit friendship that is applicable to our lives today. I offer the following definition. A Jesuit friendship is a relatively long, enduring, and freely chosen emotional attachment between one Jesuit and another; it arises out of their shared life histories together. The one Jesuit appreciates the other as a unique person who cannot be replaced by another Jesuit or any other person. The relationship of such Jesuit friends incorporates mutual affection, trust, and intimacy, while sustaining each one's desire and efforts to be of service to the Kingdom.

This definition contains several *themes* that I elaborate upon below.<sup>11</sup>

➤ **1. The desire to be together.** Those involved in such relationships experience a "desire" to be together and, where feasible and appropriate, make efforts to bring about such meetings or reunions. Thus a Jesuit is motivated to drop by a friend's room periodically within the community if they live together, or alter his itinerary in order to stop by and visit his friend if they are separated by great distances, or go out of the way to plan a retreat or vacation together with his friend. Even if meetings are infrequent or impossible to arrange, there is the "desire" to be with one's Jesuit friend. Fleeting thoughts of the other, phone calls, or letters are other means to fulfill this desire.

➤ **2. The heightened experience of positive feelings.** Interaction with a Jesuit friend generates a level of joy not experienced with other Jesuit companions. One can certainly have joyful or other positive feelings within one's community, with a group of Jesuits, or with Jesuit companions who are co-workers in the apostolate. Yet it is only with this small handful of Jesuit friends that one experiences such heightened feelings of joy. In regard to such positive feelings, one noted researcher has this to say:

It is not surprising that in our studies of the quality of daily experience it has been demonstrated again and again that people report the most positive moods overall when they are with friends. This is not only true of teenagers: young adults also are happier with friends than with anyone else, including their spouses. Even retirees are happier when they are with friends than when they are with their spouses or families.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In setting forth and discussing the meaning of Jesuit friendship, I have been influenced by the attachment school of psychology. See, for example, Mary D. Salter Ainsworth, "Attachments beyond Infancy," *American Psychologist* 44 (April 1989): 709-16.

<sup>12</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 186.

➤ **3. Loss brings acute levels of grief.** As noted above, such Jesuit friends are irreplaceable. If a Jesuit friend dies, the surviving Jesuit friend experiences a very significant level of loss and prolonged period of grief. While I was a novice, I vividly remember asking a quite elderly Jesuit how he was doing. His response to me typifies the loss we speak of here: "You know, Charlie, I'm not doing very well. All my Jesuit friends are dead and all I really want to do now is join them." Contrast this reaction to the lessened feelings of loss arising when a province notice announces the demise of a Jesuit one knows vaguely or not at all. In a similar way, of course, and to an acutely felt degree, distance between friends, departure from the Society, and reassignment can occasion the experience of sadness and loss as well.

➤ **4. This friendship provides high levels of security and trust.** The relationship of two Jesuit friends is built on a deep sense of trust. This trust affords the sharing of intimacies at a level and in a way not found in other Jesuit relationships. In turn, this trust generates a high level of comfort and security. One feels safe, secure, and comfortable with this Jesuit friend. This friend really knows me and I can readily share confidences with this friend.

➤ **5. This friendship encourages an outward-directed focus.** Because of the security in and the comfortable nature of the relationship, the two Jesuit friends are able to part from one another, to nurture and maintain other dyadic and communal relationships, and engage in everyday as well as long-term apostolic tasks. Ironically, the security fostered by closeness enables the two Jesuits actually to be separated (geographically) from one another and be about serving the Kingdom (as was the case, for example, with Ignatius and Xavier).

Again, the definition offered above focuses on a specific type of friendship pattern. To repeat an earlier statement, friendship itself is a loosely (and somewhat sloppily) used term. In its broadest dimension, we can view all the men we live with in community as friends. Likewise, those Jesuits we work with in an apostolate or on a specific project or those with whom we occasionally recreate or take our meals might be viewed as friends. By now, though, the reader should have in mind that friendship as construed in this article qualitatively differs from the relationships of "companions" of "brothers" or from the broadly conceived label of "friends." In line with the definition offered above, a Jesuit friend is a "uniquely valued person" who is "not interchangeable" in our mind and heart with any other Jesuit.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ainsworth, "Attachments," 714.

### ? Questions to Ask ?

Try giving names of Jesuits as answers to the following questions:

1. With whom in the Society do I “desire” to spend time?
2. Which Jesuits bring the greatest joy to my life?
3. Which Jesuits do I trust the most? Can you name what it is about each of these specific Jesuit friendships that leads to such a deep level of trust?
4. Which Jesuits know me interiorly and not just as an acquaintance?

## The Domains of Experience Common to Jesuit Friendship

Even though we have offered a definition and some more detailed characteristics, no consensus exists as to what constitutes Jesuit friendship. I would venture to say that if we randomly quizzed twenty Jesuits, we would hear twenty more or less closely related variations on its meaning. Nonetheless, I do believe there are specific experiences that go with being a Jesuit friend. These experiences create and foster the positive feelings spoken of above. To various *degrees*, many if not most of the following domains of experience transpire between two Jesuit friends; moreover, some Jesuit friendships will stress some domains more than others.<sup>14</sup>

➤ **1. Family background.** My Jesuit friend knows something of my family of origin. Perhaps he has visited my home, knows some of my siblings, or has just heard me talk about my childhood and adolescent years. My friend has some understanding of why I am the way I am—how my strengths and talents as well as various dysfunctions and weaknesses emerged from my family history. It is perhaps true that I have periodically shared with him some of the “family secrets” from my family of origin.

### ? A Question to Ask ?

Are there some Jesuits that know about my family history?

➤ **2. My current life situation.** My friend knows what is going on in my life here and now, my joys and struggles in living everyday Jesuit life. He knows what I worry about and what occupies my time.

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<sup>14</sup> I encourage the reader to discern the degree to which each of these domains exists in each of his Jesuit friendships.



? *A Question to Ask* ?

Which Jesuits are most familiar with my current life situation?

➤ **3. Apostolic desires.** My Jesuit friend knows about my desires as a Jesuit. As I share with him these desires, he is willing to offer encouragement, clarification, and, when necessary, challenge.

? *A Question to Ask* ?

Which Jesuits do I turn to when needing to share the deeper longings of my heart?

➤ **4. Spiritual conversation.** Jesuit friends engage in spiritual conversation. They encourage one another to speak of spiritual matters, such as prayer life. They oftentimes know each other's spiritual struggles and desires.

? *A Question to Ask* ?

With whom in the Society can I discuss my spiritual life?

➤ **5. Negative feelings.** With a Jesuit friend I am more willing to ventilate and share my negative feelings or doubts about a wide variety of matters (other Jesuits, community life, the future of the Society, or the friend himself). I feel "safe" in sharing such concerns and feelings.

? *A Question to Ask* ?

Whom in the Society do I trust enough to freely share any of my negative feelings?

➤ **6. Wishing the good of the other.** I genuinely wish the good of this Jesuit friend. If his "good" means our separation geographically or even his departure from the Society, then, even though it costs me personal pain, I wish it for him.

? *A Question to Ask* ?

Do my actions and attitudes convey to my Jesuit friend a genuine desire for what is best for him?

➤ **7. Challenge.** More so than is true in the case of other Jesuits, I am willing to intrude into this Jesuit's life. Though there are other men in the community or Society I might challenge, I am more comfortable (as is my friend) when we do this with one another, since our life histories together grant permission for such mutual intrusion.

? *A Question to Ask* ?

How comfortable am I with lovingly challenging as well as accepting challenge from this Jesuit friend?

➤ **8. Discreet silence.** Just as we might know what to say to a Jesuit friend, we also know what not to say. All of us at one time or another, very likely, have had the experience of saying something inappropriate to brother Jesuits; for example, offering comments on some person or issue that we would have discreetly omitted if we had better known the Jesuits within the group. With a Jesuit friend, on the other hand, we have a sense of when to refrain from raising a certain issue. Part of friendship is an awareness of what need not be mentioned or discussed.

? *Questions to Ask* ?

Am I prudently able to abstain from raising certain issues that need not be mentioned?

When with my friend, do I have an intuitive sense of what not to say as well as of what to say?

➤ **9. Positive feelings.** The predominant feelings emanating from this friendship are positive. A Jesuit friend stirs within the other feelings of joy and gratitude that are tremendously satisfying. In turn, such positive expressions are motivating factors that energize my apostolic desires and endeavors. When I think of joyful and grateful moments in the Society, this friend naturally surfaces as a part of some of these moments. Further, there generally is a real feeling of being able to laugh with the other and a real sense of playfulness.

? *A Question to Ask* ?

Do my positive feelings when experiencing this friendship leave me more grateful for my life and my vocation?

➤ **10. Nurturing solitude.** Experiences with this Jesuit friend spill over into other areas of my life. This friendship enriches my solitude, for it leads me to be more self-aware and creative about my life and desires.

? *A Question to Ask* ?

How am I different because of this Jesuit friend?

➤ **11. Disclosing personal intimacies.** My Jesuit friend is familiar with my life history and knows things about my life that are reserved for a select



few. Content for such intimacies might include personal and deeply felt desires, personal trauma, or my interpretation of my life history.

? *A Question to Ask* ?

What do I share with this Jesuit friend? Do I know him as well as I would like to? Are there areas we avoid speaking about?

? *Questions to Ask* ?

1. Reflect on each of your Jesuit friends. To what degree does each of the above experiences characterize your relationship with this man?
2. Are there certain experiences in the above I might be able to improve upon with this man?
3. Am I motivated to discuss with this man and creatively work together with him to foster these experiences?

## Problem Areas in Jesuit Friendship

Obviously, since we are all “human,” forming, developing, and maintaining “friendship” in the Society takes us along a bumpy road that is all too replete with pitfalls and false turnings. Below are some common “problem areas” that sour Jesuit friendship, preclude its growth, or undermine its healthy development.

➤ **1. Possessiveness.** Healthy growth in human affection does not proceed without mistakes; one of the most common is possessiveness. There are times I might wish to preempt the attention or time of another Jesuit when he is preoccupied or does not wish to reciprocate my feelings. As younger Jesuits develop their affections within the Society, they learn that working out an adequate balance in interpersonal relationships or emotional homeostasis within the community can to some extent be accomplished only by a process of trial and error. A similar pitfall takes the form of the feelings we have when a Jesuit friend wishes to leave the Society. Rather than wish “his good,” we are at least tempted to minimize his questions or perhaps try to manipulate his decision.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Though, of course, because we are human, we naturally feel the hurt and pain of such a departure as well as experience the naturally occurring “healthy selfishness” of wanting such a brother to remain a member of the order.

? *Questions to Ask* ?

Think of each of your close friendships in the Society and ask yourself: Am I being overly “possessive” of this friend?

If true, is there someone with whom I can talk this feeling out?

➤ **2. Overactivity.** Unfortunately, many Jesuit friendships fail to form or thrive because one or both men are just too work oriented. All they know in their experience of one another is their apostolic labors; sadly, they have never gone beyond this dimension of their lives.

? *A Question to Ask* ?

In my relationships with brother Jesuits of whom I am fond or with whom I labor in the apostolate, do we place too much emphasis on work, thereby imposing a monodimensional nature upon these relationships?

➤ **3. Excessive emotional involvement.** On the other hand, we can perceive the subtle tendency to center too much on an affective level and focus excessively on feelings. We encounter this pitfall if we misguidedly experience friendship for the most part as a way to indulge in feelings with too little regard for apostolic labors and desires. Narcissistic tendencies are often found in such relationships.

? *A Question to Ask* ?

Is there a discipline to my friendships in the Society that allows for feelings yet also nurtures apostolic labors and desires?

➤ **4. Competition.** As individuals sort out their place within a group, they fall prey at times to a natural tendency to allow some form of competitive desire to modify a definition of roles and function. Such posturing typically takes the form of a healthy competition and should not be a cause for concern. It would be ludicrous to think that a group as highly talented as the Society could or should strip itself of any competitive desire among its members. On the other hand, some Jesuit relationships take on a serious “sibling rivalry” as each man tries to outdo the other. Some Jesuits experience themselves as always competing with their brothers, every other man’s success looming as a threat to their own self-esteem. For such men, freedom

to respond to the Lord's grace in their relationships becomes instead a need to best the other in order to preserve precarious feelings of worth.

? *A Question to Ask* ?

How do I feel when those closest to me in the Society achieve success? Am I overly competitive with brother Jesuits?

► **5. Complaint-driven relationships.** At times Jesuit relationships can be built not on mutual solidarity but on chronic complaining. It is not too hard to find fault with our communities, the men living in them, and the apostolates they carry out. As such, we find stretching before us a rich lode of deficiency ready for mining, and some men have become expert at doing so, carping and moaning with one another, mutually reinforcing one another's complaints. Not surprisingly, if one deficiency is removed, such "friends" immediately transfer their criticism to another irritation in order to justify their carping manner. If they discover no deficiency, they soon create one; otherwise, the two men would have nothing to talk about! Of course, there are many things wrong with the Society, and I do believe that our order is in "crisis." I do not wish to endorse some form of spiritualization whereby we avoid facing issues and problems. We must prudently complain about the Society, especially with friends, pointing out serious problems that as loving brothers we need to address. By "complaint-driven" I mean simply a relationship whose primary reason for existence is voicing dissatisfaction and criticism.

? *Questions to Ask* ?

Is complaining given too much attention in any of my Jesuit friendships? What purpose does such complaining serve?

Does criticism begin with a sense of gratitude for the Society?

► **6. Impairing relationships.** At one point during my time in studies, there was a custom in the house that on Thursday evenings a group of the brethren would gather for a beer party. The men would stay up late, drink heavily, and regale one another with stories about the week and about their plans for the weekend to come. As a new week commenced, these men would speak openly about the merriment of the previous Thursday night and happily anticipate their upcoming Thursday get-together. At the time, my peers viewed this experience in a very positive light; now that a good many years have slipped by, I think many would question whether this weekly experience really contributed to building friendship as described in



these pages. On the contrary, on the basis of hindsight, many would more likely interpret these weekly gatherings as convenient opportunities for substance abuse. Friendships can be enormously enriching and growth fostering, yet they can also be impairing and destructive (what one most likely should call a “false” friendship). Some relationships are formed around a substance, with one “friend” enabling the other. Besides substances, personality factors such as dependency, idealization, narcissism, control, dominance, and passivity can promote the introduction of varying degrees of dysfunction into Jesuit relationships.

?    *A Question to Ask*    ?

Does this Jesuit friendship foster “healthy” behaviors? What would people I respect say about this friendship?

## Being Male, Religious, and Friends

Over the past few decades, an ample body of research has emerged on the topic of friendship patterns among Americans. People associate distinctive characteristics with the word “friend.” These commonly include keeping confidences, showing loyalty, displaying warmth and affection, giving support, and being frank.<sup>16</sup> In his well-known account of adult-male development, the psychologist Daniel Levinson observed that “in our interviews, friendship was largely noticeable by its absence.”<sup>17</sup> He went on to note that “a man may have a wide social network in which he has amicable, ‘friendly’ relationships with men and perhaps a few women. In general, however, most men do *not* have an intimate male friend of the kind that they recall fondly from boyhood or youth” (*ibid.*, emphasis added).

In a similar vein, the sociologist Robert Bell notes that several characteristics dominate male friendships. For one, men are focused on doing—they relate to one another through activities rather than self-disclosure. Consequently, the role the male occupies in society is critically important not only to supply his needs for self-esteem but also to establish who he is as a mature, functioning adult. “Women overwhelmingly reveal many of their fears, anxieties, and insecurities to their best friends, while men overwhelmingly do not. The close friendship between women is generally defined as self-revealing and accepting, whereas the close friendship between

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<sup>16</sup> Mary Brown Parlee, “The Friendship Bond,” *Psychology Today* 13 (October, 1979): 45-49.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel J. Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man’s Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 335.

men is subjectively defined in terms of doing things together.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Bell observes that men experience a major problem in admitting their personal anxieties and fears. Raised in what is often a competitive atmosphere, men are often unable to acknowledge their own vulnerabilities. “[I]t therefore becomes difficult for men to mutually disclose much about themselves because the disclosure can lead to increased vulnerability in the competitive setting” (85).

For the typical American man to change this friendship pattern would require significant changes, according to Bell.

A shift for men would mean a move from the public to more private aspects of friendship. For men to enter into private, intimate types of friendship would mean they would have to make important psychological and social commitments and changes. This would mean the development of new relational skills that would call for changes in men’s views about competition, sexism and its values about male supremacy, and especially about fears of homosexuality. Such fears often involve far more than overt sexual behavior; they also include all “effeminate” qualities. These can include compassion, aesthetic interests and feelings, and the expression of such emotions as fear or personal hurt by crying or reaching out to another.

It may be that many males in American society want to become more expressive and open in their feelings. Many men have benefitted from such expression, from the reduced potential for ulcers and other anxieties caused by pent-up emotions to freer and more intimate interpersonal relationships with family members and friends. But to do so means giving up many of the value commitments to notions of traditional masculinity. And it is difficult to give up what has been a part of your life for so many years. The socialization to sex roles can be so powerful that for some men they are difficult, if not impossible, to overcome. (92)

Men’s traditional reliance on achievement, emotional suppression, control, and power no doubt leads a considerable number of them to experience emotional dysfunction as well as behavioral and physical problems.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, we should resist a simplistic view of friendship that equates it merely with what the psychologist Carol Tavris terms the “feminization of love.” Men’s traditional ways of behaving (for instance, emotional suppression) prove problematic, yet women’s ways of relating might also not always be adaptive. Whereas men on the average are more emotionally suppressed than women, they are more able to weather and

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<sup>18</sup> Robert R. Bell, *Worlds of Friendship* (Beverly Hills, Cal.: Sage, 1981), 80.

<sup>19</sup> Richard M. Eisler and Janice A. Blalock, “Masculine Gender Role Stress: Implications for the Assessment of Men,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 11, no. 1 (1991): 45–60.



distract themselves successfully from negative feelings by "doing something." In contrast, women are apt to focus indiscriminately on feelings, with the result that they "rehearse their problems and constantly brood about them, rather than learning to distract themselves or take action to solve them."<sup>20</sup> A more balanced perspective, I think, is to view optimally any friendship pattern between two men, two women, or a man and a woman that incorporates both feeling and action. There is a place for both ways of being. And a healthy friendship allows either expression when appropriate.<sup>21</sup>

I do not believe that religious men in general or Jesuits in particular exemplify the type of male friendship that is simply action oriented and devoid of sharing feelings. In fact, evidence suggests otherwise. The psychologist Sheila Murphy discovered from survey data that diocesan priests as well as men and women religious place a high value on friendship. She found that middle-aged men and women religious as well as diocesan clerics

cultivate intimate friendships. Valuing their friends, they delight in the mutuality of personal exchange and quality time together and believe themselves to be better persons for taking the risks involved. Overall, it seems that celibate males do not fit the relational stereotypes of men in general, nor do celibate women and men live out the scripts of detachment and isolation promulgated during early formation.<sup>22</sup>

Most certainly the Society of Jesus is a social system where warm, deep, and affectionate relationships exist. Indeed, I can think of no other organization that provides the opportunity for rich friendship between so many complex personalities (and characters!). It is a gifted resource we all too often take for granted and fail to consider when evaluating our lives. Moreover, when Jesuit relationships reflect healthy intimacy, they serve as a countercultural witness in a world more inclined to dominance and self-serving forms of relational expression. On the other hand, we Jesuits are men, and we delude ourselves if we think the power, control, and attach-

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<sup>20</sup> Carol Tavis, *The Mismeasure of Women* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 268.

<sup>21</sup> Though men's style of doing and distracting themselves from negative feelings embodies positive features, it is not without a downside: the inability to recognize sadness, anger, or depression. It is the inability of some Jesuits to acknowledge and deal with their negative feelings, I suspect, that to a great, or at least to some, extent fuels their zeal for apostolic work. For such Jesuits a busy schedule or constant activity offers a distraction from such feelings and an unhealthy substitute for real human integration. Excessive television watching or computer work can be another form of unhealthy distraction.

<sup>22</sup> Sheila Murphy, *A Delicate Balance* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 47. One concern I have with her data is that considerably fewer men than women returned her survey. One might speculate that this low return rate might reflect issues and conflicts some of these men had with discussing questions of intimacy and sexuality.



ment problems that impinge upon other men do not influence us, too. Like so many other men, too many of us armor ourselves against experiences of vulnerability and refuse to acknowledge the darker aspects and brokenness of our personal lives. Sadly, this proves to be a disastrous flaw as we attempt to cope with aging and change within our communities. Far too many communities include many highly defended men either unable or unwilling to communicate. Though some communities have made progress on this front, my impression is that we still, for the most part, do not know how to talk with one another. My own observation is that those who find community dialogue difficult are usually the same men who lack the healthy friendships I describe in these pages. Inability to communicate and dialogue on an individual level renders religious frightened and obstinate at more communal types of dialogue.

### ? Questions to Ask ?

1. What is my experience of being "vulnerable" in the Society? To what degree do my friendships in the Society provide opportunities for vulnerability?
2. Does the climate of my community encourage friendship formation? Does my community provide an experience where men are invited to be more trusting and open on a group level? What can I do in my community to encourage such a group experience?

## III. Intimacy, Sexuality, and Jesuit Life

*It is impossible that I should ever forget your charity to me. You will remain always so fixed and engraved on my heart that, even though you write me never a word, though I may never be able to look upon my Polanco's face again, it is beyond my power not to love and cherish the very thought of you in your absence.*

—Letter from Peter Canisius to Juan de Polanco

**W**hat do we mean by human intimacy? As a man or woman goes through later adolescence, he or she senses more and more the internal stirrings that urge closeness and touching. These feelings become central motivating forces influencing both adult behaviors and life satisfaction. Intimacy is a basic human need that, when not experienced adequately in life, leads both to intolerable degrees of loneliness and to human dysfunction. Loneliness exists as part of everyone's life, and coping

adequately and creatively with such feelings is essential for our adaptivity and mature functioning. Individuals (and this very much includes Jesuits) will go to extraordinary lengths to distract themselves from and defend against such painful feelings.<sup>23</sup>

Intimacy involves the desire to be close and to share one's deepest feelings and thoughts with others. It is the desire to know the other and be known by the other. Figuring in discussions of intimacy are dialogue, mutual activity, support and security, positive feelings, psychological growth, and self-discovery. To be noted, however, is that, whereas intimacy appears to be a requirement for healthy living and subjective well-being, the desire for intimacy varies, some people showing higher motivation for intimacy than others.<sup>24</sup>

Jesuit friendship is a vital, indeed essential, experience both for intimacy building and for well-being in the Society. It stands to reason that the emotional bond characterizing intimacy must be perceived at a high level within the confines of one's commitment. Naturally, spouses direct this intimacy towards their marriage partners (though for healthy living each partner would have other sources for intimate relating, close friends, that is). What about the Jesuit? Where does he find such intimacy? Obviously there are many sources. Examples include intimacy with the Lord through prayer as well as a wide circle of friends—the "gift" of celibate living. For optimal psychological functioning, however, a Jesuit must also discover and experience such intimacy within the Society. Jesuit friends provide the concrete experience of affective nurturing necessary for healthy commitment. To view this another way, any significant commitment we make needs some perceived level of emotional bonding. For the Jesuit, the experience of Jesuit friendship aids in the necessary task of focusing his affections within his commitment. Without this emotional valence flowing from Jesuit friendship, the man is most likely less rooted in the Society and subject to the centrifugal forces that will distance him over time from an authentic experience of Jesuit brotherhood. Another practical advantage emanating from Jesuit friendship is that those who live in a difficult or highly dysfunctional community can oftentimes look to Jesuit friends for the solace that allows them to weather such discomfort, thereby keeping them loyal to the Society and its mission.

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<sup>23</sup> We should, of course, avoid deluding ourselves that one can find a life devoid of loneliness. Every married person as well as every single adult periodically experiences loneliness. Needless to say, friendship offers a sturdy buffer for managing and coping with such feelings. Perhaps this is what Sir Francis Bacon meant when he reflected, "The worst solitude is to be destitute of sincere friendship."

<sup>24</sup> Dan P. McAdams, *Intimacy* (New York: Doubleday, 1989).



Further, a corollary flowing from this union of affective bonding and commitment is that it furnishes a monitor of a man's growth in relationship building within the Society. A key indicator in the evaluation of a man's progress in formation should be his capability to form and maintain healthy Jesuit friendships, as outlined in this article. Writing as a clinical psychologist, I suggest that a Jesuit in formation who cannot sustain or show significant progress over time in developing such friendships (provided he has received encouragement, challenge, and professional assistance, or at least the opportunity to avail of such assistance) should be dismissed.<sup>25</sup> Also, when a man departs from the Society, one key question needing attention is, Did he have Jesuit friends? I always feel more comfortable when I know that a departing Jesuit has experienced several friendships in the Society. Such a man, psychologically speaking, most likely has more freedom to leave. On the contrary, a man who departs without having experienced healthy Jesuit friendship most likely departs for the same reason that he entered—unacknowledged levels of loneliness and need. Nonetheless, such a man most likely should leave the Society. I am more content to see the first man depart, simply because he is very likely more psychologically free and accordingly more capable of responding to the Lord's grace, whereas the latter man most likely labors under a psychological deficit that eclipses the freeing power of the Lord's call.

Close friendship between two Jesuits focuses our attention on the need for human affection and closeness. Such feelings are part of each Jesuit's sexuality when sexuality is viewed more properly as a way of being and relating rather than in its narrow sense as solely a means for genital expression. If we accept this broader definition of sexuality, we see that every Jesuit's friendship with another Jesuit is in some measure sexualized. To experience friendship with another Jesuit means to experience the sexual aspects of oneself in relation to this other man. Sexuality pervades the Jesuit's entire life. As James J. Gill, S.J., observes,

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<sup>25</sup> I realize that some readers may judge this opinion as harsh. In response I must say that friendship and companionship are so intrinsic to the very nature of the Jesuit vocation that a man who finds too much difficulty in this regard simply does not show the signs of a vocation to Jesuit life. In addition, given the very serious issues the Society faces regarding community life—aging, diminishing numbers, and mental-health issues among Jesuits—we simply harm ourselves as a corporate group if we allow such men to continue in Jesuit life. We need only observe the sad state of such formed (and friendless) members of the Society and their effect on apostolic and community functioning to realize, I suggest, the need for a more proactive stance regarding dismissal. For a wider discussion, see my "Mental Health of Jesuits."



Another aspect of our life, affecting all of what we think, imagine and do is our sexuality. Every cell of a Jesuit's body is identifiable anatomically as a male cell; every physical or mental faculty we have is a male's. Our sensations and perceptions, memories and imaginings, are accomplished by a male's senses, brain, and mind. The thoughts, feelings, attitudes, desires, choices, deeds and experiences of every sort which emanate from within us are all in some way a male's activities. Every gesture, every conversation, every interaction with others, including God, is sexualized to some extent; in our case these all convey a flavor of maleness. Similarly, every woman's interior and exterior activities all have a sexual aspect to them and carry an intrinsic quality of femaleness. Interaction of any sort between two persons of the same sex will, therefore, always have an aspect of sexuality about it, and can be called in a limited sense "homosexual." This is true of conversation, friendship, or even shared prayer.<sup>26</sup>

Given that we are dealing with a specific type of male friendship (Jesuit) and given the widespread publicity about sexual orientation, it seems appropriate to discuss friendship, sexual orientation, and intimacy in Jesuit life.<sup>27</sup>

There exist no scientific surveys on the sexual orientation of Jesuits. Any statements on the number of Jesuits who are heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual are strictly speculative.<sup>28</sup> It should not be surprising if it were a

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<sup>26</sup> James J. Gill, S.J., Introduction to "Affectivity and Sexuality: Their Relationships to the Spiritual and Apostolic Life," *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* 10, nos. 2-3 (March-May, 1978): 49.

<sup>27</sup> Some readers might note that the tone of this article now shifts from a personal to a more clinical-scientific style. This change is intentional. To my knowledge, no Society publication has ever substantively dealt with the issue of sexual orientation in Jesuit life. Hence, this more serious, factual approach is, I think, warranted as a way to initiate and encourage discussion. It is my hope that this initial venture will encourage such public discussion regarding these aspects of our relationships as Jesuits.

<sup>28</sup> The number of men in American society who are exclusively homosexual is a matter of ongoing debate. Statistics depend upon the survey methods employed and the investigator's definition of homosexuality. For example, a survey that defined a homosexual as any male who had ever had some form of genital contact or sexual arousal with another male would result in a quite significant number of homosexuals, because many adolescent males engage in at least some display of physical contact or experience sexual arousal with one or more other males of similar age. In the vast majority of instances, this behavior is best interpreted as sexual experimentation and an aspect of adolescent growth dynamics; it does not betoken a future homosexual orientation. On the other hand, a survey restricting its definition of "homosexual" to adults whose orientation is exclusively focused on fantasy and sexual attraction toward other males would most likely indicate that homosexuals represented only several percentage points of the population.

significant number.<sup>29</sup> My own impression, though admittedly speculative, is that the number of Jesuits in any one community who are gay or bisexual depends on a large number of factors. Some such factors influencing the mixture of sexual orientations for any community include age of the community members, ideological orientation of the community, geographic location, sexual orientation of permanently assigned Jesuit members of the house, and the community's apostolic focus or purpose. In various combinations certain mixtures of the above might lead a community to have a number of non-heterosexual members that ranges from zero to several.

Regardless of the exact figure, the presence of diverse orientations can be a source of misunderstanding and tension. Given the increasing liberalization in American society leading to an openness about sexual lifestyles and feelings, and granted the self-discovery of young adulthood (ages twenty to forty) and the inevitable tensions of relationship building during the long formation period, it is understandable that tensions can arise in our communities.

## Issues to Confront

At this point in our discussion, it is helpful to identify problems in Jesuit living that some heterosexual and homosexual Jesuits might need to consider and that we *all* need to reflect upon seriously. First, homophobic attitudes do exist in American culture. And some Jesuits, being products of American culture, unfortunately do possess homophobic attitudes. Derogatory remarks reflecting such attitudes are blatantly uncharitable and have no place in Jesuit life. Jesuits uttering such remarks may be heterosexuals who are uncomfortable with any man who is not heterosexual in orientation, or men insecure about their own sexualities. In more limited cases, my impression is that some of these Jesuits harbor within themselves homosexual feelings that they can neither acknowledge nor come to terms with. In such cases, derogatory and uncharitable remarks directed towards others become a classic instance of projection onto others and a convenient means for personal denial and a distraction from their internally conflicted lives. In either case, it is most likely fair to assume that, at a minimum, such Jesuits evidence some lack of personal integration in their own emotional development.

Another problem that life in the Society can foster is that such highly defended men often stubbornly refuse to commit themselves to the more personalized type of ongoing shared dialogue that younger Jesuits expect to find and that most certainly is called for if we are to respond to

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<sup>29</sup> See Stephen J. Rossetti, "Statistical Reflections on Priestly Celibacy," *America* 170 (June 18-25, 1994): 24.

the Society's contemporary documents summoning us to be communities of discernment. The attitudes of these men present a significant roadblock to bettering fraternal understanding and personal relationships within our communities. These men can proclaim what I term the "homosexual myth," erroneously branding any type of personal sharing as acquiescing to some type of homosexual lifestyle. So uncomfortable are such men with their own feelings, or with issues that might trigger certain feelings, that they unfairly label the very human experience of brotherly dialogue as a sexual-lifestyle issue!

A final problem presents itself when some heterosexual Jesuits' inhospitable attitude leads to division within the Society and makes others feel unwelcome whose sexual orientation differs from their own. In a sense their lack of charity breeds exclusion, the very criticism they often direct at gay Jesuits.

On the other hand, some gay Jesuits must be challenged regarding behaviors that prove problematic for Jesuit life. For example, some Jesuits with a homosexual orientation can cause alienation within the community. My impression is that some gay Jesuits have set up a linkage between attitudes concerning orientation and conflicts with superiors (authority figures).<sup>30</sup> As a consequence, they distrust the superior and interpret any question of or challenge to their behavior or attitudes as the superior's "homophobic behavior," which makes him "unable to understand me." A variation of this authority issue occurs when a gay Jesuit displaces onto the superior his anger at earlier adult figures who have hurt him. In certain cases some superiors by their statements and actions may have treated gay Jesuits uncharitably, perhaps expressing their own homophobic fears and/or sexual insecurities or prejudices. Because some personal issues such as sexual orientation touch upon a fact so central and basic to our nature as loving and relating beings, even a single uncharitable remark by an authority figure within the Society (for example, a provincial, rector, and the like) directed toward one's sexual orientation can prove enormously hurtful, leave festering emotional scars, and erode the man's trust of the Society. Though superiors are not perfect and, as I have pointed out elsewhere,<sup>31</sup> the manpower shortage may make it increasingly difficult at times to appoint provincials, rectors, and superiors with all the leadership abilities that we might desire, my own impression is that the fault lies at times with the gay

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<sup>30</sup> Anger towards authority is hardly an exclusively homosexual issue. Many heterosexual Jesuits also display this characteristic. My personal observation, however, is that proportionately speaking, it is more an issue for the homosexual Jesuit.

<sup>31</sup> Shelton, "Mental Health of Jesuits," 23-25.



Jesuit.<sup>32</sup> Sometimes the gay Jesuit can use "superior blaming" as a rationalization to avoid confronting and resolving issues in his own life that need to be addressed. Like the prejudiced heterosexual Jesuit described above, some homosexual Jesuits simply have not resolved personal-life issues and find blaming others a convenient rationalization.

Another behavior I have observed is that some gay Jesuits become inordinately preoccupied with their own emotional needs and place undue emphasis on communal sharing and dialogue to the detriment of the apostolic focus of the community. Obviously, both community sharing and apostolic focus are vital for healthy Jesuit living.

A third issue springs from some homosexual Jesuits' desire for self-identity. Behaviorally this presents itself as a preoccupation with self-development and identity issues touching upon sexual orientation. Examples of this preoccupation are associating for the most part only with other Jesuits of the same orientation or forming specific judgments, for example, automatically refusing to consider even for a moment having any heterosexual Jesuit as a spiritual director or retreat director. It is understandable that in his pursuit of growth and the self-understanding associated with it, a homosexual Jesuit might seek understanding and support from other gay men. Moreover, gay men can often experience negative feeling states, such as diminished self-esteem or crippling guilt feelings. Naturally, another man who has experienced similar feelings might be the most understanding. Yet there is a fine line between such support and the danger of exclusivity that precludes the brotherly companionship we are called to as Jesuits. My own advice in such situations is that the gay Jesuit ask himself (and challenge himself) to consider whether such behaviors *over time* foster a self-understanding that encourages and promotes bonding and connection with other Jesuits and the wider Society or whether instead they reinforce exclusivity (patterns of relating primarily or exclusively with gay Jesuits).<sup>33</sup> Only the former is acceptable for our Jesuit brotherhood together. The latter leads to a dangerous self-absorption that has for some resulted in harmful narcissism and will do so for others if it is not critically examined.

A final issue surfaces when some gay men in the Society insist on making their sexual orientation visible through public behaviors or publicly

<sup>32</sup> Of course, it takes two to tangle, and both the Jesuit and his superior often share the fault to various degrees.

<sup>33</sup> There should be over a period of time a growing number of observable behaviors that demonstrate this man's willingness to bond with the wider Society. Any man, whether he is heterosexual or homosexual, who finds it difficult to relate in an inclusive manner within the Society should seriously examine whether he ought to remain a Jesuit. At times superiors might need to encourage this examination.



proclaiming their orientation before the wider believing community. This is an enormously complicated issue that must take into account personal motivations (of which the individual may not be fully conscious), notions of equality, as well as personal and social interpretations of public behaviors.<sup>34</sup> Above all, those involved have much need of prudence when making such decisions and should give particular attention to the *contextual* nature of Jesuit life. A Jesuit's commitment and subsequent connection to the Society, the Church, and the priestly ministry itself and what these represent necessitate taking all these factors ("contexts") into account when anyone makes statements or acts publicly in certain ways. No Jesuit, indeed no person, lives a context-free life. And the commitments we make and the contexts surrounding us necessitate compromise and various types of self-denial. No commitment in our lives or context in which we are inserted can allow for unreflected individualized expression devoid of dialogue and consideration of others' well-being and situations. Being overly preoccupied with sexual-orientation issues or excessively focused on the vocal and public expression of such issues denies the numerous interconnections that are integral to Jesuit life. As a consequence, every Jesuit must consider these contexts before he takes action, and must dialogue about such matters with superiors and other Jesuits in order to show respect for these contexts. In my view, any Jesuit, whether heterosexual or homosexual, who finds difficulty in accepting some compromise in his behavior out of regard for the contextual realities of his life needs to seriously examine his motives and the defensiveness that he might be experiencing.

In a related manner, all Jesuits, whether they be heterosexual or homosexual, must be concerned with the rampant sexualization that permeates our times. One of the most harmful developments in modern culture is the constant promotion of highly sexualized forms of relating that undercut the essential meaningfulness of significant relationships as personally intimate and private forms of faithful commitment. When sexual expression is part of faithful commitment (for instance, marriage), there is something essentially private about such expression that should be encouraged. This private dimension of sexuality points to the exclusivity and fidelity that sexual expression within the commitment portrays. If anything, the seductive nature of advertising has already sexualized our everyday attitudes and behaviors to a significant degree. Whether homosexual or heterosexual, *all* Jesuits are called to exercise prudence as well as to refrain from events,

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<sup>34</sup> Some reasons why a man might wish to make public his orientation could involve identity, intimacy, or self-esteem issues. Yet in some cases these might be combined with "unconscious" issues, for example, provocation, passive-aggressiveness, or developmental-immaturity issues, such as control.

occasions, or places that encourage seductive, enticing, or romanticized displays of sexuality.

In view of all this, how should every Jesuit concretely experience a celibate relationship with his brothers? Or, in other words, what is it appropriate to share in the area of sexuality? My own view runs along the following lines. Because some aspects of our sexuality are very intimate to us (orientation, sexual experiences, struggles and joys regarding the vow of chastity, to mention a few), I would hope that every Jesuit has several Jesuit friends with whom he can share in private these most personal aspects of his life if he should so wish.<sup>35</sup> Such communication not only signifies deep trust but ratifies the quality of the friendship and its meaning in the Jesuit's life. At another level, in an ongoing community sharing or faith-sharing group, there most certainly can be discussion of views, feelings, and attitudes regarding the area of sexuality. Further, there can also exist self-revelation, though in general the self-disclosure will not attain the consistent level of self-revealing intimacy that occurs between two close Jesuit friends. Naturally, what is self-disclosed depends to a great extent on the history, make-up, and purpose of the group.<sup>36</sup> Finally, at a third level in the everyday banter or communication that takes place among Jesuits, there can be discussion regarding friendship and sexuality, but this is usually less personal and more general in scope.

Drawing on the three levels above, let us be very specific as to how information can be shared. Let us use the example of this article. Obviously, I hope that the contents of my essay and the views set forth within these pages stimulate discussion. At the first level, the relationship between two close Jesuit friends, I hope these two Jesuits could get together after reading this article and quite personally share aspects of their own lives pertaining to issues of friendship and sexuality. Topics might include what their own Jesuit friendship means to them and how they experience it with one another, what individual struggles and joys living the vow of chastity has brought them, or what their individual sexual-life histories can reveal about them. At the second level I would hope that this article might stimulate a group of Jesuits to dialogue about the content of this essay as regards Jesuit friendship (as an example, each man could talk about the Jesuit friendships

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<sup>35</sup> I would also hope that each man has non-Jesuit friends as well to share such personal intimacies. Because my focus in this article is Jesuit friendship, I restrict my discussion to this form of relationship.

<sup>36</sup> Examples of groups where such information could be shared include faith-sharing groups that bring together a number of Jesuits from different apostolates, an ongoing shared group process that exists within a community, and a gathering of Jesuits in formation.

he has experienced in the Society and point out how the community can help him live the vows; or he could explore his understanding of the implications the vow of chastity has for him, or discuss how the Society deals with sexual orientation). At the third level several Jesuits who work together in an apostolate might sit around after dinner or in the rec room and one might ask, "Did you read that STUDIES article on friendship?" Then a general, unplanned discussion might ensue treating topics such as how the Society's training encouraged or discouraged friendship formation.

My point is a simple one. Some issues of sexuality are deeply personal experiences; to discuss them inappropriately or too broadly de-means this very personal and beautiful gift the Lord has entrusted to us. Furthermore, in some measure we validate and proclaim close friendship by prudent disclosure. We signify a special trust and bond between ourselves and a Jesuit friend when reserving for him *alone* some privileged self-disclosure not accorded to most other Jesuits. Likewise, we would validate the results of a shared group process or a meeting of Jesuits if our discussion of sexuality attained a level and quality of communication not found in ordinary Jesuit communal conversation.

## Chaste Maturity

Whether a Jesuit be heterosexual or homosexual, he certainly needs chaste maturity.<sup>37</sup> By "chaste maturity" I mean in essence

- a. the Jesuit's genuinely living the vow of chastity in both attitude and behavior (for instance, by refraining from genital sexual behavior, maintaining a loving and open disposition within his community, as well as a charitable attitude and an altruistic stance toward others)
- b. self-awareness as to one's own sexual orientation and adequate acceptance of it
- c. the desire to remain celibate and the willingness to take whatever steps (for example, psychotherapy, environmental or behavioral changes) are needed to resolve or at least come to terms with lingering developmental and sexual issues that adversely intrude upon

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<sup>37</sup> I intentionally use the phrase "chaste maturity" rather than "maturing chastity." Why? My personal experience as a religious as well as a clinician who has worked extensively with priests and religious in professional settings convinces me that the emphasis should be placed on the noun "maturity" rather than "chastity." In other words, in numerous instances the issues surrounding living the chaste life have more to do with developmental maturity (and immaturity) issues than with the experience of chastity per se.



one's personal, interpersonal, communal, and apostolic functioning.<sup>38</sup> The above three dimensions of chaste maturity should be viewed as a *process* in which a man engages at deepening levels and understandings while living in the Society, rather than as an automatic internalization accomplished all at once. To a significant but not absolute measure, evaluation of men being formed in the Society should proceed along the lines of verifying growth and progress in chaste maturity rather than exacting its perfect attainment.<sup>39</sup> For example, I would hope that any Jesuit at final vows would be able to describe this chaste maturity with more wisdom than a man at the early stages of formation!<sup>40</sup> Progress rather than ultimate achievement should be the norm; for the very nature of chaste maturity bespeaks developmental issues, maturing forms of self-understanding, insight, and human affection, hardly concrete data that can be neatly packaged for immediate and final shipment! As such appropriation of chaste maturity transpires in a Jesuit's life, there will be for most men (whether heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual) some serious questions, some significant struggles, and some experimentation with others. Though the Society through its superiors can understand the reasons for such experimentation (developmental growth, falling in love, and similar situations), it cannot tolerate such genital sexual behavior by its members. Such behavior undermines the radical trust the Lord, the Church, and the wider believing community place in us as vowed celibates and ministers of the Gospel. Furthermore, such behaviors undermine the very *integrity* of the Society: a

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<sup>38</sup> The greater awareness of sexual orientation as well as healthy and enlightened formation policies will, it is my hope, enable a man seeking entrance to the Society to be aware of his own sexual orientation and to proceed in a mature way towards deepening levels of chaste maturity. My own view as a clinical psychologist is that a man unaware of or significantly uncomfortable with his sexual orientation should be deferred until such time as he develops such mature self-acceptance.

<sup>39</sup> I say "not absolute measure" because not every aspect of chaste maturing is, strictly speaking, a process. For example, the Society must require that every member refrain from genital sexual expression no matter what his age or situation. This is a nonnegotiable position in the man's relationship to the Society, the Church, and the People of God. However, even here, we may hope, as the individual pursues his life in the Society, he may gradually acquire a deepened personal insight into the significance and meaning of such prohibitions. The Society, likewise, expects of Jesuits appropriate behaviors, such as Christian charity and mature forms of relating together. But again, there should be concomitantly a process of deepening and maturing in one's loving attitudes and behaviors.

<sup>40</sup> See also Shelton, "Mental Health of Jesuits," 43f.



Jesuit who relates genitally lives in contradiction to the publicly proclaimed vows he has taken. In essence, such behaviors reflect dishonesty with the Lord, God's people, and one's brother Jesuits.<sup>41</sup> I have no idea how many Jesuits may have at one time or another experimented sexually either in heterosexual or homosexual encounters nor, might I add, does anybody else. But what we can say is this: The Society must without exception uphold the integrity of the vows and rightfully expect every Jesuit to live chastely as explained above (that is, in chaste maturity). Furthermore, as a group living chastely together, we must acknowledge and speak more openly about the complexity of the vow of chastity and the myriad factors leading to questions about, struggles with, and violations of it. A list of these factors includes genuine affection and love, developmental and identity issues, previous socialization and family upbringing, temperament, narcissistic acting-out, displacement of feeling, the need for intimacy, the quality of community life, coping abilities, level of defensive functioning, maturity in spiritual life, loneliness, cultural influences, and so forth.<sup>42</sup> Finally, individually and corporately we must support one another in deepening our level of chaste maturity by encouraging and sustaining *healthy* behaviors. Among these are personal commitment to spiritual and emotional maturity, quality community living, healthy relationships (particularly the intimacy provided by Jesuit friendship as spoken of in these pages).

## Signs for Chaste Maturity in a Jesuit's Life

If living chastely entails a maturing process, then the question arises, What are the appropriate "signs" that such maturity is taking place within the man? When the Society evaluates a man (as happens, for example, at first

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<sup>41</sup> Religious sexually active who see nothing or little wrong with their behavior are often prone to resort to the less-than-mature defenses of rationalization (saying, for example, "It makes me a more loving and whole person"), minimization (for example, "It really isn't that serious"), compartmentalization (failure to examine such behavior), or some other thinking pattern associated with these defenses.

<sup>42</sup> Any violation of the vow, I believe, would incorporate several of these factors as well as perhaps others. Sexual behavior, like all behavior, is subject to numerous influences. As the reader might already have realized, another reason that the Society cannot tolerate violations of the vows is the threat of litigation and its financial implications. Superiors in the Society have a fundamental obligation to protect the Society's resources so that such funds can be used for the training and care of its men as well as for appropriate apostolic commitments.

vows, ordination, and final vows), what criteria should it look for? Moreover, when a Jesuit wishes to examine his own life and reflect on his own growth in chastity, what experiences should he consider?

I offer the following preliminary remarks before listing a set of indicators for growth that the Society and a man might evaluate personally. First, as the reader has no doubt noted by now, living chastely is considerably more multifaceted than refraining from genital sex. Chastity involves appropriately and maturely experiencing one's sexuality in everyday life. As noted previously, sexuality refers to our way of relating: it incorporates emotions, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors. Chastity is experiencing one's sexuality in an appropriate and maturing fashion. Thus, whether we are religious, married, or single, we are obligated to live a chaste life in the context of our own particular life situations. To be specific in the Jesuit context, chaste maturity denotes an ongoing process of growth in how a man relates not only to his Jesuit friends but to all men and women. Further, it means ongoing development in his own self in order to ensure that such growth in relationships does take place.

Another point that must be stressed is that we experience no set of indicators for chaste living entirely and all at once! I encourage the reader to think of the following signs for chaste maturity as processes leading to greater mastery. All of us will do better at some than at others. The important point is that we *develop* and *continue* to grow in them throughout our lives as Jesuits. I believe the indicators I list below are the "heart" (and most important) part of this article. Why? If we are to be men living the vow of chastity with integrity and engage our Jesuit brothers and other men and women in loving and caring ways, then we must address the concrete (and human) issues and experiences that foster such expression.

The following indicators (signs) aid us to examine how someone is currently experiencing chaste maturity in relation to Jesuit friends as well as relationships with other men and women.<sup>43</sup>

1. Developing adequate *interpersonal skills* for promoting, sustaining, and enriching relationships<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> I would encourage the reader to set up a *time frame* when examining each of these indicators. For example, take from novitiate to the present or a five- or ten-year period and reflect how you have grown or not grown with respect to each indicator. I also encourage the reader to share reflections on these indicators with trusted Jesuit friends and in a shared group process with brother Jesuits if the Jesuit is fortunate enough to be part of such a group.

<sup>44</sup> Many of these statements might be experienced as "heavy" (or overwhelming to some); that is, when examined seriously, they excite strong emotional reactions or life concerns. As a consequence, I urge readers not to confine themselves to merely reading



2. *Deidealizing* significant figures (for instance, friends, parents, important older adults in the Society) so that I experience these relationships as nurturing and supportive, yet remain capable of acknowledging the appropriate negative feelings and disappointment these important relationships have generated in my life
3. Opening myself to developing *other relationships* in my life when opportunities present themselves and to broadening and deepening my personal relationships so as to include non-Jesuits, married and single people, women and men
4. *Increasing my self-knowledge* and insight into parental practices in my family and other socialization experiences that have positively and negatively influenced my relational behaviors
5. Acknowledging any *traumas* in my life (for example, abuse, inadequate parenting) and growing in the realization of how these experiences have affected my relational functioning
6. Deepening *gratitude* for my life and the significant relationships that have enriched it
7. Tolerating and sustaining a capacity for *intense feelings* (falling in love, and experiences of loss, to cite only two), while cultivating the ability to cope with such feelings and prevent them from dominating my life
8. Growing in my sense of *generativity*, which becomes more and more the rationale for my apostolic pursuits
9. Fostering a sense of *inclusiveness* in relating to my brothers in the Society
10. Developing the capacity to voice *prudent criticism* of the Society's way of relating fraternally to its members
11. Having adequate self-esteem based on who I am as *loved by God* rather than on what I achieve or possess, all the while realizing that humanly speaking my self-worth will *never* be complete and fully satisfactory to me
12. Acknowledging *sexual feelings and fantasy* as part of my life; having such experiences, yet also maintaining a perspective on them, not allowing them to intrude into or dominate my life excessively

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through the list. Instead, they should spend time with each item and make these twenty-eight indicators a form of reflective reading stretching over a period of several weeks, perhaps taking one or two indicators every couple of days and giving each the attention it deserves.

13. Fostering *impulse control* regarding the vows and my life in general, a control flowing more from my sense of personal *integrity* than from duty
14. Feeling a sense of *guilt* when appropriate and having a sense of humility about my life and action
15. Growing in the productive capacity for *solitude*, desiring it and using it in ways that promote deepening self-knowledge and health
16. Establishing appropriate *boundaries* between work, social relations, and the like, all leading to a *healthy balance* in the face of various commitments
17. Developing a greater capacity to be reflective about and critical of behaviors involving my relationships; specifically, growing in the discerning sense of when my behaviors are *inappropriate* or when they encourage *dysfunction*, and knowing how to remedy such actions
18. Developing a perspective on my life story that encourages an inner narration that brings together my past and present experiences as well as my future goals into a *meaningful totality*
19. Becoming more aware of *negative feelings* I might have and understanding what triggers them, how they are expressed (particularly in relationships), and how to develop healthy ways to manage them
20. Growing in the capacity to understand *another person's perspective* and to make significant judgments only in light of such perspectives
21. Accepting my *sexual orientation* and being able to view it as an aspect of my overall identity, without denigrating its function in my life or excessively focusing on it
22. Accepting that I will *never* totally understand some aspects of my sexuality or fully integrate them into my life, and developing a corresponding ability to live *adequately* with such ambiguity
23. Promoting *flexibility* in sex roles—my views of masculinity and femininity
24. Recognizing how *cultural factors* have shaped my attitudes and behaviors as regards sexuality
25. Viewing the *Lord's handiwork* through my affective life and relationships and growing in an awareness of how my relational ties have shaped my life project
26. Growing in the capacity for *forgiveness*, particularly regarding those significant relationships in my life, both past and present



27. Acknowledging and tolerating *loneliness*
28. Growing in the capacity to experience *enjoyment* about my life and adequate *self-contentment* through healthy and appropriate behaviors

It bears repeating that the reader should evaluate himself in terms of progress and growth regarding each indicator.

## The Role of Jesuit Friendship

Personal struggles in the observance of the vows or sexual-orientation tensions that might exist among us are permanent aspects of our lives: they are simply part of being *human*. And to paraphrase one wise mental-health expert, we are human before we are anything else!

Be that as it may, we ought not underestimate the sustaining and nurturing power that Jesuit friendship provides both for our personal lives and our relations with one another. Regarding the specific issue of sexual orientation, the most realistic and healthy way to foster harmony among *all* Jesuits in their communal relations is to acknowledge that sexual orientation is not the major issue nor should it be the primary focus. Sexual orientation exists as one piece of the larger puzzle that each of us constructs and recognizes as his personal identity. Yet Jesuit life is *not* about having identity per se, but about aiding souls in companionship, though of course developing a healthy identity is crucial for such an apostolic and relational focus. As such, I believe every Jesuit's goal should be to move through the question of sexual orientation and increasingly center his energies on the generative pursuit of apostolic service ("aiding souls") and the quality of our relational experiences ("in companionship"—fostering Jesuit friendship and healthy community living). The optimal means for realizing these twin themes of service and companionship is the experience of *friendship*.

Jesuit friendship—existing when each of us holds others close to our heart—captures, I believe, in a way beyond any other experience the *essence* of what mission in companionship means. It accomplishes this by providing three functions for the Jesuit:

First, Jesuit friendship is *accepting*. A Jesuit friend allows me to be *who I am*. With this friend I am more comfortable and less defended than I am in other brotherly relationships within the Society. I am most myself with this friend—more aware of my humanness, more capable of considering possibilities and alternative ways of seeing, and more adept at gaining insight into myself. In effect, in experiencing friendship I feel rooted and most at home; and because I am less defended, I am more able to direct my psychic energies toward other growth-producing experiences and apostolically enriching endeavors. We cannot overestimate the human desire to be

accepted for “who we are” and the power of Jesuit friendship to respond to this longing and the fruits issuing from it.

Jesuit friendship is also *hopeful*. Even though every community I am part of or every relationship I share will fall short of my ideals and disappoint me in some ways, Jesuit friendship as described in these pages most closely approximates the ideal (the relationship I desire between myself and the Society). Jesuit friendship is the most cherished and best indicator we have that Jesuit life works well, humanly! We all are in need of such human affirmation—the knowledge that our lives *as Jesuits* can and do work on a loving, human level. This loving human experience offers us hope regarding the Society’s ideals of community life and fraternal relating. In addition, it provides a protective buffer against moments of discouragement and temptations to cynicism. Where would I be and who would I be without this nourishing experience of hope that Jesuit friendship provides?

A third function deriving from Jesuit friendship is *generative*. When I am nourished humanly by a Jesuit friend, I am eventually drawn outward in service because my love for this friend is rooted in an intimacy with the Lord that nourishes and sustains the friendship, yet beckons my desires outwardly. The more I reflect on Jesuit friendship, the more I have come to see that the notion of “project” is crucial for it. Historically, the concept of “project” is a rich one. For the Greeks one’s project was best understood as the pursuit of the “good.” One can interpret the Ignatian spiritual tradition as explaining the notion of project through discovering one’s “deepest desires.” More recently, a popular research topic has set psychologists to identifying life projects by examining life themes and goals. Such themes provide coherence, giving our lives meaning and purpose. Sad to say, one conclusion drawn from recent research is that far too often we fail to probe adequately our own life themes and become consciously aware of our life goals. Far too often we fail to adequately fashion our life projects as Jesuits and we ignore the crucial roles that our Jesuit friends might play in helping to implement them. Yet, only a developing life project that friends can embrace and nurture within one another enables the friendship to avoid excessive sentimentality and escape a subtle but alluring narcissism. True friendship helps sustain a life project that is generative while providing a moral reference point for future life decisions. Concretely, this means that the probing, sharing, and challenging characteristic of Jesuit friends as they relate together and pursue various apostolic enterprises should ideally help each of them to consciously articulate his life course—where the Lord has led him, how he has concretely responded in all his joys and struggles, what he desires for the future, and what concrete focus his current and future lives take. Each of us needs Jesuit friends to supply this conscious attentiveness



and intrusion that allow for the mutual building of life projects. From a psychological point of view, the dialogue of friends that sustains and enhances one's life project captures the "heart" of spiritual conversation. It is something our modern era has all too readily abandoned. Most fortunately, Jesuit friendship offers, I believe, the best way for a Jesuit to recapture this fruitful discourse.

In the process of developing their life projects, Jesuit friends direct one another towards the ideals that brought them together and made them friends—the mission of aiding souls through companionship. As a consequence, the friendship of two Jesuits is a transcendent encounter whereby the two are not mutually self-absorbed, but are bonded in a mutual vision of creating the Lord's Kingdom here and now. Focusing on this mission does not deny the very human warmth and affection that two Jesuits might have for one another, nor does it banish the pain of separation and the loneliness that arise from the desire to be with an absent Jesuit friend. Yet the mission places this affection in a context that does not allow it to become an end in itself. This is the only way I can make sense of how Xavier and Ignatius, given their deep love for one another, could have parted never to see one another again.

In summary, what I am arguing is that the *experience* of Jesuit friendship brings with it an essential thrust that is accepting, hopeful, and generative, and that these three functions ground and increasingly cement a man's fidelity to the Society and its mission.

Having portrayed this accepting, hopeful, and generative function of Jesuit friendship as an antidote to our personal struggles and to the tensions existing in our communal life today, I do not for a moment believe that Jesuit friendship will eradicate by itself sexual-orientation tensions or other interpersonal problems and frustrations evident within our communities. Friendship is one piece, albeit a vital and major one, in a larger effort.<sup>45</sup> What I do maintain, though, is that we will undermine our apostolic efforts and desires as well as create more personal and interpersonal problems for ourselves if each of us does not experience the friendship I describe in these pages. Given the lures of the media age, the widely held beliefs of a psychologically focused culture, and the publicity surrounding the behaviors of some priests and religious today, perhaps at no time in our history has the focus on healthy friendship building become so important and necessary to

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<sup>45</sup> In short, "optimal" Jesuit living includes personal mental health, healthy relationships, and commitment to community. I have touched on these themes in my article "Mental Health of Jesuits." See also my "Toward Healthy Jesuit Community Living," *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* 24, no. 4 (September 1992).



nurture and sustain our individual vocations and the Society's apostolic vision.

## IV. Some Questions regarding Jesuit Friendship

*Whether I should be sorry now or glad, I do not know. My sorrow is that I have lost my most dear and loved companion [Robert Southwell]; my gladness, that the man I have cherished so much has risen to the throne of God, where he will be given the recompense earned by his labors.*

—Letter of Henry Garnet to Aquaviva

I hope that Jesuits who have read the first three sections of this essay will find themselves with new questions and thoughts regarding their own interpersonal living of the Jesuit life. Though on a topic like friendship there are always issues or questions left unanswered, I will now try to anticipate and address some specific questions about Jesuit friendship, utilizing a question-and-answer format. In responding to these questions, I will draw upon developmental and clinical research, my own experience, and, I hope, some good common sense!

### 1. Over the years can one's friendships with Jesuits change?

Absolutely. With some friends there might be gradual growth and deepening of the relationship over time. On the other hand, there are friendships that initially hold out the possibility of great promise, only to terminate in subsequent disappointment. Some friends are "friends" for a set period, but after a while their friendship simply fades out. There are many reasons for this. For one, friendship takes discipline and effort. Even if friends naturally get along at the beginning, they need to find some time to converse and "catch up" or they might drift apart and go their separate ways. A second reason that a Jesuit friendship can be disappointing is that developmentally, over time, one's needs change. Two Jesuits who are assigned to the same house or who enter the novitiate together might at that particular juncture relate well with one another. Perhaps they are kindred spirits or are lonely or share the same interests. But as each man grows and develops, his interests can shift and his developmental needs can point him toward other life areas or interests. How many of us encounter once again a Jesuit whom we had known in a prior community setting or formation period, only to discover that he does not reciprocate our desire to converse or rekindle the relationships. Most likely, the other man's interests and energies lie elsewhere (or perhaps ours do). It may be that one of us needed a relationship with a certain Jesuit at a particular time in his life but now

envisions his life and needs differently. Or perhaps one Jesuit has matured developmentally and now presents a threat to the other; as a consequence, the friendship dissolves. Though such changes in Jesuit friendship do happen, still, ongoing communication could in some instances reverse a trend or at least alleviate disappointment. As we know, Ignatius, a prolific letter writer himself, urged Jesuits to write to one another. (Perhaps if he were alive today, he would recommend that we use faxes and internet!) Commenting on the way Jesuits communicated, he had this to say:

Everyone seems to have failed in this regard, and so a copy of this letter is being sent to all. . . . I exhort and I beg you by his love and reverence to improve your writing and to conceive some esteem for it and a desire to edify your brethren and your neighbor by your letters. . . . If some of you in the Society are busy, I am convinced that I am not less busy than any of you, and with less health than you. . . . So, again I beg of you, by your love and reverence for the Divine Majesty, put your heart in this matter and get to work with all diligence; it will contribute so much for the spiritual progress and consolation of souls.<sup>46</sup>

His insight on the need to stay in touch through communication was perceptive and sound. I do believe that Jesuits could eliminate a significant measure of hurt and disappointment by bringing more discipline to bear when communicating with Jesuit friends.

## 2. How many Jesuit friends can one have?

There is no real answer to this question. As noted in our discussion of intimacy, the level of intimacy needed by each man varies. Some of us will have a wider circle than others. Quantity is not so important, but quality is. Every Jesuit needs at least one brother (and we may hope that he has more) with whom he can share his spiritual and apostolic desires as well as the emotional joys and hurts of his life. If a man lived a normal life span and could honestly say that he had experienced a dozen good Jesuit friendships, then he has most certainly been richly blessed. Think for a moment what the Society would be like if every man had the capacity for such friendship and kept in touch with several of these friends on a regular basis! Though this is admittedly an ideal to strive for, I don't think any of us would deny that actualizing it would result in a much more energized, joyful, and committed group of brothers.

Obviously, the matter of boundaries needs to be addressed here. We have only so much psychic energy. We can relate intimately with only so

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<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Simon Decloux, S.J., *Commentaries on the Letters and Spiritual Diary of St. Ignatius Loyola* (Rome: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, 1980), 114.

many brother Jesuits, and closeness with some men implies appropriate distancing from others.

Healthy interpersonal living involves both distance and intimacy. A person who strives after intimacy with everyone experiences it with no one. In order to give and receive in some relationships, one is going to have to be more distant in other relationships. A celibate person striving after universal love must realize that this does not mean universal intimacy. Christian love and psychological intimacy are not the same. We are called upon to love all men and women. We are not called to psychological intimacy or Christian friendship with everyone.<sup>47</sup>

On the other hand, some Jesuits unfortunately opt for just a very few friends and close themselves off to new relationships. Other men have been burned by the departure of Jesuit friends. I have known several Jesuits to say that they don't make friends in the Society any more because oftentimes the men just leave!

### 3. How does the intimacy of Jesuit friendship relate to availability?

As I understand Ignatius and Xavier's relationship as well as friendships among other early Jesuits, the intimacy they found in friendship was the "secure base" they utilized to allow them to be available; that is, the security they experienced in their relationship naturally led them to focus on missioning rather than to worry about the relationship. More than anything else, I suspect that the love that Ignatius and Xavier experienced was so secure that the thousands of miles separating them could not dampen their feelings for one another. As I noted earlier in this article, the paradox of healthy Jesuit friendship is that the bond that unites two Jesuits in friendship also allows for separation. This is not to deny the loneliness of separation or the desire to be together once again. Indeed, if you can believe the letters Ignatius and Xavier wrote to one another, they had such an intense longing and desire for reunion. But friendships that nurture and sustain missioning make such separation bearable.

At the same time, however, we must also give serious attention to the cultural climate in which present-day relationships are formed. As I noted earlier, a psychological paradigm exists in our culture, and the quality of relationships is a norm against which people evaluate their own well-being. Furthermore, our knowledge about psychological well-being has grown enormously since Ignatius's time. In today's complex, technologically advanced, and stress-inducing world, many experience relationships not only as avenues for well-being but as respites from the stressors continuously harrying them in everyday life. I have heard several Jesuits in their fifties and

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<sup>47</sup> Donald Goergen, *The Sexual Celibate* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), 157.



sixties say how welcome it would be to have more time together with the few remaining friends who accompanied them through the course. Perhaps in this modern era, when so much is in doubt, such friendships represent an intangible security. In addition, many younger Jesuits are distressed to realize how few are entering our ranks and how many have been leaving them. This, combined with the dysfunctional state of some of our communities, makes living productive, holy, and happy lives in the Society a real challenge, if not a struggle. We cannot dismiss these realities in the name of a blind availability for missioning that refuses to take into consideration our humanness and frailty. What I am getting at is that when superiors mission a man, they must give very serious consideration to the quality of community life into which they are sending him, as well as to the opportunities he will find there for building relationships and networking with his Jesuit friends. If superiors do not take these factors into account, Jesuits so missioned might prove to be dutifully obedient, but I am afraid that they will also turn out to be emotionally stunted and often impaired (which in the long run will only undermine the Society's service to the Church). We need only look around some of our communities today to see how painfully true this is. In other words, availability is conditioned to a significant degree by a community's ability to foster and maintain its Jesuits' health; and within this context, friendship plays a vital role.

**4. Will the focus on Jesuit friendship complicate or undermine the wider communal friendship we Jesuits are called to?**

Ideally no. Given the realities of human frailty, however, it can happen. Men who form deep friendships can't help but provoke jealousy, backbiting, and insecure feelings among those in the community who lack such relationships, though these critics might be too heavily defended to acknowledge such feelings. In cases like this, it is the other men who have a problem, not the two friends. At the same time, all Jesuits and their friends must be aware that they have obligations to the wider community, including the need to devote time and energies to wider communal activities. There is no ideal equation here to spell out how much time or energy a Jesuit should devote to each type of relationship (individual friendship and communal friendship); it all depends upon temperaments, the type of community, the members in it, the number of friends one has. But conscious awareness and discussion of the proper allocation of time are vital if the entire community is to functioning effectively.

One final point. The tension of particular versus communal friendship is likely to be exacerbated in smaller communities. Obviously, in such communities the absence of two men who are friends is likely to come to the attention of others more readily; and if their friendship is too exclusive,

other brothers in the house would have less possibility to enjoy similar relationships. Again, openness, mutual understanding, and, ideally, discussion of such issues within the house are imperative.

**5. What about Jesuits who don't experience the type of friendship discussed in this article?**

I sadly admit that there are Jesuits who fall within this category. Because of a combination of temperament, learning history, training in the Society, and cultural assumptions, these men have never experienced the joy and richness of friendship depicted in these pages. On average, these are older rather than younger Jesuits, though some younger Jesuits fall into this category as well. Oftentimes these men, even if advanced in years, are emotionally underdeveloped or even impaired. We must reach out to such men and encourage them to be active community members and loyal brothers, but we must also be realistic about such men's capabilities and limitations. Above all, we must not become so focused on men of this sort that we overlook the need to encourage and nurture mature relationships on both an individual and a communal level among the more healthy men within the community.

**6. Does focusing on Jesuit friendship place too much emphasis on a psychological understanding of our lives and detract from the Society's apostolic missioning?**

Excessive talking about Jesuit friendship could well have a downside and terminate in an exaggerated narcissism. If we resist this temptation, however, we will find that Jesuit friendship as defined in these pages nurtures a mission in companionship that is apostolically focused.

Furthermore, I offer the following speculative hypothesis: Jesuit friendship is crucial for nurturing a Jesuit's apostolic zeal and ministry. Healthy friendship in Jesuit life will lead to open discussion and mutual challenge. It is hard to believe such conversation would not include at times some dialogue about the Society's mission and apostolic focus. Further, as noted above, the intimacy of Jesuit friendship incorporates a generative thrust that sustains apostolic vision and discovery. Such experiences are fertile soil to nourish apostolic concerns. Furthermore, by its very nature friendship fosters empathy for the other—a key component for any pastoral activity.<sup>48</sup> Finally, a Jesuit who lacks Jesuit friends experiences a tremendous void. He might be tempted in such cases to assuage this loneliness or fill this void with an all-encompassing commitment to apostolic concerns (or some other intense and all-absorbing commitment). In some instances, for some

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<sup>48</sup> Charles M. Shelton, S.J., *Morality of the Heart: A Psychology for the Christian Moral Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1990).

Jesuits, their pronounced apostolic zeal, though truly genuine, might to some degree be fueled by what is lacking in their lives rather than by their commitments.

? *Questions to Ask* ?

1. Image in your mind a Jesuit friend you have not kept in touch with or have neglected.
2. Do you have the desire to make some type of commitment to get in touch with this man through letters, phone calls, visits?
3. What will you say to him? What must each of you do to sustain the relationship? Do you have the motivation to do this?
4. How have you dealt with the sadness and hurt of Jesuit friendships that have ended? How have such feelings affected your life, your vision of the Society, your living in community, your behaviors?
5. Do you have a community situation where you and other Jesuits can meet together and discuss friendship? If so, try this exercise: In your community group have each Jesuit in the group take a few minutes and speak about his closest Jesuit friends and reveal why these men have been important to him.

## V. Conclusion

**A** final comment—one that is personal. As I have written this article about the various aspects of Jesuit friendship, I have experienced a wide range of feelings, some of them intense. Most positively, the strongest feelings triggered are happy ones—memories and images of my present friendships in the Society and the joys they bring me. Yet, there are other feelings also. While writing, I have experienced sadness, loneliness, anger, and hurt as I recall friendships in the Society (and outside it) that have ended or never—at times through my own mistakes—achieved their full potential. More important, I hope that, as you finish this article, you have such feelings, too. Unless we Jesuits adopt an honest and self-critical stance toward our love for one another as brothers and friends, then our desires to have such friends will be no more than velleities.



In sum, the notion of Jesuit friendship is an extraordinarily rich one. Yet, we can only talk so much about such relationships. Ultimately, they must be experienced (and risked) in the daily ins and outs of each of our Jesuit lives, lives that incorporate and share the joys, hurts, hopes, and sorrows of being human. Robert Southwell once wrote as follows:

If you love a friend so much, if he or she is so attractive that everything he asked of you, you would agree to; and if it is so sweet to sit and talk with him, describe your mishaps to him—then with how much more trust should you betake yourself to God, the God of goodness, converse with him, show him your weakness and distress, for he has greater care of you than you have of yourself, indeed he is more intimately you than you are.<sup>49</sup>

There will be something askew in every Jesuit friendship that is not grounded above all in the intimacy with the Lord that Southwell describes. Still, there is the *human* side to consider, too. Every Jesuit friendship brings us a little closer to this Lord, for every experience of friendship provides us with a taste of heaven—the fidelity, trust, and joy experienced now as Jesuit friends—a prelude to what life with him will be where such fidelity, trust, and joy will be augmented to their fullest. Perhaps this is why Jesuit friendship as understood in these pages is so precious, unlike most other life experiences, and for the Jesuit in some way unique. For Jesuit friendship's *τελος* remains always an aid in defining the Jesuit in the here and now, while offering the surety that his deepest desire might one day be realized.




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<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Philip Caraman, S.J., *A Study in Friendship: Saint Robert Southwell and Henry Garnet* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995), 3. The quotation from Henry Garnet beginning this section, written the day after the execution of Robert Southwell, is found on p. 95 of Caraman's book.

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